

SARAH HAVILAND

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Sarah Haviland Artist Statement

My work focuses on human-bird imagery found in cultures around the world—most recently seen in East Asia during a five-month Fulbright grant. I make drawings, sculptures, and installations that explore relationships among these archetypal images and our present social and environmental concerns.

In my art practice, I foreground the very human impulse to project ourselves onto nature, encouraging identification and empathy. My goal is to synthesize and share through my art these human-avian hybrid visions, to promote contemplation of our important connection to birds, especially in a world of migrations, endangered species, and global climate threats.

My fascination with bird-figures began with the kinesthetic experience of gesture and observation of people and birds, alone and in relationship. Further inspired by stories and images from many cultures, my drawings and sculptures speak of human aspirations and the soul, and of conflicts between our internal impulses and awareness of the outside world. From ancient winged deities to popular culture's flying heroines and villains, such icons affirm our desire to reach beyond the human realm.

Seeking resonance, I aim for concentrated images in surprising materials that address contemporary life. In my sculptures I use common hardware-store wire mesh, found objects, and recycled materials. Using tinsnips and pliers and techniques borrowed from sewing, metalwork, and paper craft, I turn tough construction-grade materials into delicate, volumetric drawings in space. My process follows five steps: image research; sketching shapes and gestures; creating forms bent by hand and joined by wire or welding; defining planes with cut mesh, paper, or plastic; and adding select textures, colors, light and shadow to highlight linear frames. For some outdoor installations, I construct with local organic materials like bamboo to emphasize our dependence on nature. Often, I synthesize images and stories of bird-people with reference to specific regional birds and local myths.

My project about human-bird connections has led to cross-disciplinary as well as cross-cultural conversations: with anthropologists, curators, religious scholars, bird-watchers, environmental artists, and average citizens. It has revealed neglected common ground between diverse populations, all responding to the significance of birds in our lives, in practical, symbolic, and emotional terms. The images, facts, and stories about human-bird connections gathered in my research form a collection that I seek to share in multiple ways: from visual artworks, to writings, to educational resources. Among these is a new blog: www.BecomingABird.com